



AFP- European newspapers on Saturday praised the decision to award this year's Nobel Peace Prize to the EU, with the notable exception of the British press, most of which poured scorn on the decision.

"EU have got to be joking!" the Sun tabloid said in a headline, quoting Conservative ex-finance minister Norman Lamont as calling Friday's prize "ridiculous and absurd".

"Nobel peace prize for idiocy," declared the right-wing Daily Mail, beside a photo of protesters in Athens dressing as Nazis while demonstrating against European Union-imposed austerity as German Chancellor Angela Merkel visited this week.

Elsewhere the press reaction was much more favourable, despite several commentators pointing out that the European Union, wracked with debt and deficit and struggling to maintain its coherence, is not currently looking its best.

"Good idea, bad laureate," opined German magazine Der Spiegel.

"No one can seriously reproach the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the European Union.

"That's the problem, it's a too-easy decision. It would have been more courageous to highlight

someone, Jacques Delors, who embodies what European policy lacks these days," referring to the French former head of the EU's executive commission.

The Belgian *Le Soir*, in an editorial entitled "60 years of peace despite the crises", said that "European citizens, many of whom have reasons to lose hope today, should take this Nobel Prize as a reminder that Europe has up till now been a major player in the progress of democracy".

The Italian centre-right daily *La Stampa* took a similar view: "The prize comes as a surprise during the most difficult moments of the process of continental integration, as the crisis hits families incessantly... It is finally a concrete recognition of a path which has afforded the continent 67 years without conflict."

For the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* the European project "is not a project of the past, but remains a mission for the future. The Nobel Peace Prize should restore the courage of Europeans to continue to work towards their common goal."

It was all very different from the attitude taken in the British press where even the left-of-centre *Independent* used an image of Greek rioters, surrounded by debris and tear gas, on its front cover, with a quote from the Norway-based Nobel committee: "A unique project that replaced war with peace" (photo by Jessica L Sheriff).

The *Times* dubbed the award "frivolous" and said the European project had turned into "a utopian scheme for remaking the continent of Europe". Its commentators slammed the rise of the extreme right as well as the debt meltdown.

And the conservative *Daily Telegraph* wrote in an editorial that the decision "prompts, above all, one question: is it too late for Alfred Nobel's heirs to ask for their money back?"

"The greatest service it has done is not to diplomacy, but to comedy."

The Financial Times was a lone British voice backing the award, saying it "rightly recognises a historic feat".

Prime Minister David Cameron is under pressure from right-wingers in his Conservative Party to hold a referendum on whether Britain should change its relationship with the EU, or pull out altogether.

He has repeatedly said that the crisis afflicting the euro, of which Britain is not a member, is hurting his country's recession-hit economy.